

Ag Community Has Strong Showing At Chamber Banquet

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was honored with the 14th George C. Delp Award for a lifetime of dedication and service to agriculture.

From 1979 until his retirement this September, Shirk was responsible for dairy and 4-H programs with the Penn State Cooperative Extension of Lancaster County. Prior to 1979, he served as dairy agent in Chester County and assistant agent in Snyder and Somerset counties. His professional career spanned 41 years.

Jay Shannon, chairman of the Lancaster Chamber ag committee, quoted from several of the many nominations Shirk received for the award. An "invaluable asset, teacher, adviser, and a great ambassador for agriculture," were among the comments.

Perhaps Shirk's most notable and widely recognized trait is that he "shows a kind and caring attitude to everyone he comes in contact with," Shannon said.

Shirk's dedication to helping dairy farmers remain competitive and meet their families' needs can be best characterized in Shirk's own words.

"As I work with dairy farmers, I try to put myself in their shoes," he said.

Shirk grew up on his parents' dairy farm near Quarryville and was graduated from Solanco High School. He went on to study dairy science at Penn State, earning his bachelor's degree in 1959 and master's degree in 1961.

Three families from south of Lancaster were honored with Century Farm Awards for operating farms that have been in the family for at least 100 years.

A slide show recalled brief histories of the farms owned by Kenneth and Thelma Garber, Willow Street; Elvin T. and Martha Harnish, also of Willow Street; and Robert and Barbara Rush; Strasburg.

The Garber farm has been in the family since 1897. Ken and Thelma formerly managed a Guernsey herd and now focus on raising crops and doing custom



Keynote speaker John Phipps urges banquet guests to expand their notion of what it means to be a farmer.

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need to be more flexible than ever in finding ways to be successful. Even more importantly, Phipps said, farmers need to work at being connected to their families and communities.

When forced to name their priorities, many farmers say, "All I want to do is farm and be happy." But if you farm, don't be surprised if happy comes in second," Phipps said. "And if you make happiness top priority, don't be surprised if you have to make some compromises in farming."

The good news, he said, is that the definition of a farmer is much wider than it has been in the past. Any number of combinations to make a living and be involved with farming are possible. These include working off the farm and/or trying a variety of enterprises on the farm.

"The people who are most successful in ag are those who try the most things," Phipps said. "You now have the ability to choose any kind of lifestyle you want."

He commended guests for attending the banquet, calling it an act of community-building.

To build community, the main thing is to "just be there," he said.

Another facet of modern life that threatens communities is the amount of time people spend in cars and trucks, according to Phipps. He said he makes a point

of having face-to-face conversations with people as much as possible.

"We spend our lives looking through a windshield," he said. "If you're outside a vehicle, you engage in conversations that have a great deal more depth."



Honored at the Lancaster Ag Chamber Banquet for owning farms that have been in the family for at least 100 years, from left, are Martha and Elvin Harnish, Barbara and Robert Rush, and Thelma and Kenneth Garber.

Photo by Dave Lefever

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— Glenn Shirk
Retired dairy agent

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The grandchildren of Elvin and Martha Harnish represent the eighth generation on their farm. Originally a William Penn grant property, Elvin's ancestors first purchased it in 1800. Son Martin and his wife Sandy manage a 40-cow dairy herd and grow a variety of produce on the farm.

The Rush farm has undergone a wide range of uses since it first came into the family in 1901. In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, two ponds were built on the property for raising bait fish, an enterprise that continues today. A poultry house, built in 1940, was later turned into a community theater and is used as a horse barn.

Also during the Monday evening banquet, guests were entertained and challenged by keynote speaker John W. Phipps, farmer and ag journalist from Illinois. He has won a number of awards for humor and quality for his monthly columns in Farm Jour-

nal and Top Producer magazines. Phipps noted the tough times faced by farmers across the country, and posed a tough question. "What if this is normal?" he asked. "What if 2002 is what agriculture is going to look like in years to come?"

Recent sweeping changes in communication technologies has led to a world where "everybody knows everything at once. It takes an effort to remain clueless," Phipps said.

"What does it mean to have this level of communication happening as rapidly as it does?" One result of this lightening-speed trans-

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